

Linda Clair
Four-and-a-half-day Meditation Retreat
Cold Ash Retreat Centre, Newbury, UK
13 – 17 November 2019
Transcription from Audio Recordings

File 4b – Saturday morning discussion

Linda: How are you going H.?

Question: It was an intense morning that's for sure. But I really wanted to extend myself and try to sit through the morning. But holy cow, the pain was just so intense, so I didn't quite make it. I feel a bit disappointed about that.

Linda: Ah, don't bother.

Question: But it's been a fantastic retreat in terms of watching, watching, watching – the pain, the resistance to pain, the thinking, the movement away, the coming back. It's been amazing, it's been really, really good. But a lot of pain in the tailbone, which was hard, but it's gone now. I was thinking I wish it could be really intense without it being painfully intense.

Linda: Well, eventually that's what happens. And it's not always painfully intense. Eventually it's just intense without the pain, or occasionally pain. And that's what you want – you want intensity. You don't want to just be comfortable or okay, you want something else.

Question: Yes, I do.

Question: The instruction about *now* – I guess I'm wondering whether the *now* is the gap between the past and the future? This little moment, it always seems so tiny, and somehow not very helpful. Or whether *now* is a sort of space, an attitude, which is free from thinking, free from this plane, because when there is no thinking there is no sense of past and future? And that seems a big space. But then using the body to anchor that, there always seems to be change: the breath and the heart, and it doesn't seem to stand still. And even when those parameters seem to settle there seems to be some sort of fizzing about. Could you just say a bit more about the *now* word?

Linda: I could say a lot. We tend to think *now* is this fixed state, that now is fixed and we're moving around in the past and the future. Then, like you said, every now and again maybe just for a few seconds we're suddenly here. But as you were describing, now isn't a fixed state. There's movement within it but it's movement in a different dimension to time; it's not time-based but it includes time as well. So you see that there is no time, there is only now. Maybe I should say it doesn't include the past and the future but what we see and what people regard as the past and the future – relative time, relativity – it includes that. Relativity isn't now, but now includes everything that has ever happened, because everything happens now. Nothing happens in the past or the future, so nothing happens in time.

And the reason that it's so important to be grounded in the body is that when you start to get an inkling of what's involved it can really rock you, because you start to see that everything you've based your life on is not real. We base our life on time – this time-based existence – and it's not real. So even the body in a sense isn't real because it does come and go and it is subject to time – but it's much closer to reality than anything else and much more tangible. The whole thing is just so much bigger than, well, than I thought. I thought, "I'll get enlightened and get it over with and get on with my life." But it just contains everything and it's huge, infinite. It's infinite because there's no time. You realise what eternity is and it's nothing to do with the body living forever – it's something far beyond that. It's *now*, because it's always now, and that's what eternity is.

And it does contain the relative and that's the tricky part. After you realise this you have to merge the two together – the relative and the absolute. So you don't separate them and say, "There's the absolute and the relative." You have to somehow – it's a bit like oil and water merging together, but it does happen. I don't know if that makes any sense?

But it's just this incredibly, endlessly fascinating – not an idea – *reality*, it's real. So now is the only thing that's real. And people strive for it without really knowing why they're doing it or what they're doing. People strive for that extreme sense of life-or-death situations when they do extreme sports and things they just lose themselves in, just to feel completely, completely here. But this is a state where, in a sense, you become independent because you don't depend on anything to feel this. It's here all the time – now – it's always here. Ask me more questions if you feel to.

Question: I can sort of follow you from an intellectual sort of point of view because what else could it be. But that's so different from, well, you're telling us how to travel there.

Linda: When people would talk about it I'd listen and I could intellectually go, "Oh yes." But it was only at times that I really felt something else as my teachers were talking about it. It would depend on my state, how open I was, and usually it needs to be drummed in. And every now and again you go, "Ah, I do feel something."

It's logical to a degree and then the logic just goes and it turns into trust. You just have to trust, usually your instincts, whatever brought you here, which wasn't your intellect but something beyond the intellect, pure intelligence I would say.

Question: You're sort of intimating that your teachers had said something and when you encountered it you recognised it.

Linda: At times.

I wasn't particularly interested in all this and my partner at the time was interested in enlightenment and meditating. So he dragged me along to a meditation evening with a teacher who he felt was realised. The first few times it was okay – it was interesting – but I wasn't that much into it. And then one night I was talking to this man, who later became my first teacher, and something just happened. It was like I suddenly felt incredibly close with him. It was something in his eyes. I didn't know what it was and I was pretty sceptical about all this sort of stuff. And something just happened. It was like this light went on and I suddenly became very attracted to being around him. And he presented this method and I started testing it in my own experience and things started happening.

So it didn't happen all at once; it really did take time, but it was really meeting someone who had what I was looking for. And I didn't know what it was and that was the fascination. I couldn't say he was this or this. It was just something there that was *real* and I could see he was being authentic. Which didn't mean he behaved, or anyone realised behaves, in a certain way. It was just he was obviously being real. There was something there that I just couldn't put my finger on and that's what kept tempting me: this unknown, completely new state. Things that I had never felt before, that felt uncomfortable, but it was incredibly exciting as well because it wasn't based on my history, my past.

And I was sick of being me. I was sick of being self-conscious all the time, feeling inadequate – all the usual stuff that most people feel to some degree. However successful they might be in the world there's still usually, or there can be, a degree of arrogance and also this incredible feeling of inadequacy and self-consciousness. And I just couldn't stand it anymore. And I could see in this teacher and then in some of the other teachers I went to, my Zen teachers, that that self-consciousness wasn't there, there was something else. They were in their bodies but not ruled by them, in the emotional sense.

But yes, something just got me. I suppose it was just the right time, timing. And I became more and more fascinated by the whole thing and quite obsessed by it in the end, much to my surprise. I never thought I'd be in that situation.

Question: What your teachers primarily gave you was this practice rather than dharma or spiritual context?

Linda: No, I wasn't really interested in the spiritual context and the dharma. I did do a few Zen retreats, and I did a couple of insight-meditation ones: strictly Buddhist, no eating after midday and all that stuff. They were really good but I found the dharma stuff, to me, just not relevant. And even with a lot of the Zen stuff – in its country of origin, like in Japan, it was relevant and I could see that when I was there – but for me it just wasn't so relevant. I wasn't very attracted to that stuff; I just wanted to do this practice.

I did become very attached to my teachers and that really helped me. Even though I hadn't been that sort of person to become attached – especially to a teacher – that really helped me. And I wasn't scared of being attached because I could see deep down that it was this attachment that would lead to, and did lead to, the end of attachment. So I just gave myself to it. And having a teacher definitely helped me because it softened the whole thing, because it started to feel almost like a love affair. But I kept it very private – it wasn't this open adoration of someone, it was for me very private.

I was never attracted to going to see Osho or people like that because that sort of thing didn't appeal to me. But privately, I was doing the same thing; it was very similar. And it was great because I could have contact with these teachers who were realised, who are realised. I could have very close contact with them and at times I just couldn't believe my luck being able to be around these people who weren't – well, the ones in Japan were quite well known but the one in Australia, no, he wasn't very well known. But I felt he was probably more deeply enlightened than a lot of very well-known teachers around who'd have a few hundred, or maybe a thousand people around. I

would just look around and go, “Oh my god, where is everyone. They’re not here!” I was fortunate in that way. I suppose he didn’t behave like people thought he should behave too.

And really, when it comes down to it, not many people are prepared to really work at this because it’s so much more attractive to do all the other stuff. But I just wanted to do it as quickly, directly as possible. And not have to go into a monastery or anything like that because I had kids, I had work, a partner, all that stuff. So I didn’t want to have to do that. And I really feel that actually made me much more balanced in the end, to have to juggle that stuff, and it really helped my practice. Like my children really grounded me and I couldn’t just run off somewhere. I had to stay – I wanted to stay there – but they really kept me grounded. Otherwise I might have, well, I don’t know what. I just know it really helped.

Question: So you were a real person in a real context?

Linda: Just an ordinary person living in the colonies. (Laughter) You can do it anywhere, even Australia.

Question: I’ve loved being here and I’ve hated being here. And right now I’m in the hating-being-here pot.

Linda: What do you hate about being here at the moment?

Question: Suffering a certain level of disappointment in myself. I’ve realised how tricky the mind is. I can come up with these incredible insights and then I suddenly realised what was going on. The discussion around looking at the fact of thinking not at the context of thinking significantly changed my sitting. It surprised me. When I sat down once I kind of got that I expected the thinking to be overwhelming, and it was very happy to. I’ve got like a picture – I was sitting in a black space and something annoying popped in and I had this immediate flare of anger, and it was as though the anger was a curtain in front of my face and it turned into rain and it disappeared. It felt like a death experience for me. It seems clear in me that I already am; there’s nowhere to go – there’s just the need to see. Everything is here and is complete and whole. There is nothing that I can ever subtract from what I am already, but the thinking is obviously an attempt to do that.

Linda: It’s like it’s saying, “This isn’t good enough. I’m not good enough. This isn’t good enough; I can improve on it.” But you have to keep seeing that; seeing it once or realising it once is not enough. There are levels of realisation, levels of thinking.

Question: There’s something in the back of my mind that keeps looking for an experience in this and that is my question right now. If I’m standing on a flat earth and I wake up to the fact that it’s round, that’s a big moment. But it’s always been round, so when I see that it’s round...

Linda: It’s a bit of a shock; well, it’s a huge shock! And it’s the same with this. What we are doing here is preparing our body and our psyche for that huge, huge shock. It can’t just happen overnight, without enough preparation. This is all about preparation really, for the big bang, (laughter) for the big shock. There are minor shocks leading up to that and then there’s the big one. So that’s what this is doing. That’s why this practice is so, so beautiful. It *safely* prepares you for that shock because you can’t take it all at once; it needs to happen gradually.

And that's what this is doing – you see things, you realise things, and then it feels a bit like you're taking two steps back. But then you take ten forward and you keep going like that until you're quite happy – well, you're not really even happy. You're pushed over the cliff, because you don't go willingly. There's so much attachment to experience, to thinking, to me, to who I am. Really, you think you're going to become enlightened but keep who you are completely. And it's not like you'll suddenly look different – everyone will see you still as you – but it will feel completely different inside. It's like this huge implosion rather than an explosion.

We take so much on appearance, how things appear but this is the opposite; it's inside – it all works from the inside out. And then appearances really don't mean so much anymore; they're just by the way. They're interesting – maybe entertaining – but you know they're not real and you don't place so much importance on them. Never assume anything by appearance.

But this takes time. You need to be patient: patient with yourself, patient with the whole thing. And trust – trust that when the time's right, the time's right. But it takes more work. I underestimated the whole thing completely; I really did, thinking, "Oh yes, I'm going to do this in a few years and it will happen." But you have to be into it for the long haul and you can't say how long it will take. It might take three years, it might take ten years. But whatever, you're gradually becoming freer, more enlightened. You never go backwards in this. It can feel like you do, but no, you don't.

Question: That push that you're talking about, how did that happen?

Linda: For me? It's different for everyone. I was in a meditation retreat. I was sitting with one of my Japanese teachers – it was in Australia. My teacher came around and he'd never adjusted my posture before and he just slightly adjusted my posture, and I made this really strange noise. I was suddenly really embarrassed by it and something just snapped. It was like, "I've done all this work for years. I've been to Japan and just about killed myself doing it. Then I make this little noise and I'm incredibly embarrassed. I'm still reacting to it and really embarrassed by this stupid noise I made!" And something just happened. It was like I got this turbo-boost and went, "Okay, I've had enough, I've really, really had enough!" And from that point on during the retreat I just kept sitting.

I'd sit for hours and the bell would go and I'd keep sitting and I'd feel this fear come up every time the bell would go. Because before that – I think it was a ten-day retreat – the first few days I was just taking it pretty easy just cruising along. And then I suddenly went, "Okay, I've got to get serious," and so I'd just sit for three or four hours every morning. And I'd get these periods of feeling this incredible fear coming up, my body would start shaking, and I'd just keep sitting. And over the next few days it just subsided; the fear started to subside, and then it just went. So it happened over a few days. I mean it happened over years but it happened over a few days then.

And that was the push, just that simple thing. It was just like, "Enough is enough! I've had enough of this," really had enough. I mean you have degrees of having enough and you can say, "I've had enough," but you really do have to have had enough – and that was the point. And it was interesting, I remember the point where really it just changed. I was sitting and I was getting a headache – I was a little bit prone to headaches. During my practice I had to stop all caffeine because it would really affect my head; it got very, very sensitive to things. So during this retreat I started to get this headache and I knew it was probably going to keep going and get worse. I didn't really get migraines but I'd get nasty headaches. So I thought, "Oh no, I won't take a Panadol now, I'll take one after lunch, I don't want to make anything cloudy." So the headache was getting

stronger and then suddenly it just went. It was amazing how it went. It was this feeling a bit like when you take a painkiller – it just went.

Since then I have never had a headache again and I was really quite prone to headaches. In fact, I think I've hardly ever taken a painkiller since then; only a couple of times when I've had surgery and needed it, but even then I haven't had much. So it just went and it never came back. So that tension in your body that manifests as physical tension, but is really the tension of holding yourself together as this person surviving, just went and the whole body softened. There was just this incredible relief, huge relief.

Question: Do you keep getting the sense that everything is taken care of? That what I am is already taking care of everything but I've created a fictional "I" on top of that who's attempting to manage all of it? Like this little thought engine that thinks it's doing stuff but is mostly getting in the way?

Linda: So make this as body-based as possible. Keep doing that, particularly when you realise you've been sucked in once again to the whole thing – just cut it. Come back to your body; use anything you can to come back. And you need to do that again and again and again. Just like you've created this person and fed this thinking for years and years, withdrawing from it is not going to happen overnight. It won't take the same time as it did to create the whole thing but you have to accept it does take time whereas of course you want it to happen now... and it will happen now. (Laughter)

Question: This morning in the six-thirty meditation I felt quite deep in my body and had some thoughts and broke up with those thoughts. And one of them was, "I feel stupid." Another one was, "What will people think of me?" and a third one was, "Am I good enough?" They were just floating there and I could see there was no truth in them. It was quite amazing and although I still feel a bit stupid and I still worry about what people will think of me, I know there is less of that now. Had breakfast this morning and it was really different from having breakfast yesterday. And the next meditation I tried to use my body again and was feeling quite centred. And I thought about the question, "Am I good enough?" I had this answer that it's not for other people to say. So this feeling that this is my journey and I've got a lot of stuff, and I need to leave this behind. So I just wanted to get it out and move on.

Linda: Good.

Question: Is this going to last very long? Is it good to just stay with this?

Linda: You'll feel very different after this retreat and you'll see what's happened and how things have changed afterwards. Not so much during it because when you're doing it you're totally in it; it's really intense. But when you go back out there, in the sun, things will become clearer.

Question: I'm really happy. I do worry, have thoughts, about going back home, "How am I going to continue this?" It's hard on your own.

Linda: We might talk about that tomorrow – post-retreat management. (Laughter)